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| **Project** | **NBDC (N2)** |
| **Title** | **Participatory video for ‘vertical communication’ of rainwater management issues between farmers and policy makers** |
| **Author(s)** | **Beth Cullen, Alan Duncan, Aberra Adie** |
| **Domain** | **Research** |
| **Story** | This Most Significant Change Story focuses on the use of Participatory Video (PV) to increase community participation in Nile Basin Development Challenge (NBDC) Innovation Platforms (IP). AnInnovation Platformis a need-based network of different stakeholders for exchanging knowledge and developing joint action. Within the context of the NBDC, platforms aim to create conditions which foster innovation capacity and thereby bring about change in livelihoods and natural resource management. Desired outcomes are changed habits and practices, improved links between stakeholders and increased capacity of communities to engage in collective action and other local agents to support them.  With these outcomes in mind, the objective of using PV was to change policy makers’ attitudes towards farmers and increase farmer participation in rainwater management activities. Rainwater management interventions in Ethiopia have historically been implemented in a top-down fashion without due regard to the needs, aspirations, constraints and livelihood realities of local farming communities. Lack of farmer awareness is also something which is regularly mentioned by higher level stakeholders. Such attitudes are not conducive to farmer participation or capacity building and hamper implementation. Community members are often not called upon to voice their opinions or take part in discussions about the policies that affect them. Instead there is a performance of ‘participation’ and as a result local realities rarely enter the decision-making process. It is hoped that greater dialogue between community members and policy makers at local level will contribute to the increased participation of communities in future processes and thereby contribute to a change in the way that rainwater management interventions are planned and implemented. This is important because it has been shown that approaches which actively involve farmers have a much greater chance of success. It is well documented that in the past farmers have destroyed the results of their work under collective schemes partly due to top-down approaches.  The change process began with a participatory video training facilitated by Beth Cullen (ILRI), Gareth Benest (InsightShare) and Aberra Adie (ILRI). The training involved a group of twelve farmers in Fogera woreda (district) in Amhara region of Ethiopia for ten days. Farmers were selected from three kebeles (neighborhoods) in different parts of the landscape (upland, midland and plains) and consisted of six men and six women of varying socio-economic backgrounds. None of them had ever used cameras before the training. Perhaps surprisingly for an area where farmers are increasingly apathetic and indifferent towards research efforts there was full attendance throughout the PV training. Community members planned and shot their own film focusing on land and water management issues which was then shown to other community members in three kebeles (neighborhoods), CGIAR researchers in Addis Ababa, and members of the Fogera innovation platform.  Some changes in attitudes have already been observed. During the training, farmers were observed using audio-visual equipment by government staff and development agents who expressed surprise at the participants’ abilities; as such the PV process seems to have challenged prevalent attitudes towards farmer capabilities. This became particularly evident when the film was screened to IP members, after the screening a national researcher stated ‘We have a lot to learn from community members. I have now come to realize that the farming community is capable of identifying problems and indicating solutions’. A member of the woreda administration said ‘Today I have come to realize that farmers can play a role in solving their problems by participating actively. It is advisable to keep involving farmers in discussions; they should participate in all stages, from planning and preparation to implementation’.  The PV process also seemed to have an empowering effect on the farmers involved in the PV training as well as those who attended the community level screening. PV enabled the participants to reflect on their current situation, to identify key issues and to clearly articulate their views to decision makers and members of the wider community. It is hoped that this will influence their ability to participate more actively in future planning and implementation processes. Unfortunately, the PV process did not involve farmers from the IP intervention sites because they were selected after the training had occurred. Greater engagement between IP members and community members in the intervention sites will be focused on in ongoing community engagement work. There are also plans to bring together community members involved in the PV process with those participating in the pilot interventions to discuss IP activities. This will hopefully lead to a greater sense of ownership and active engagement with the process.  Although some changes in attitude have been observed since the IP film screening, the extent to which the attitudes of IP members have really changed is uncertain. This will be monitored over time to assess the longer term impact of the PV work by tracking the degree to which community concerns are incorporated into the design of the pilot interventions. A principal constraint on the work is the amount of time needed to develop trust and a common understanding with the various stakeholders in order to bring meaningful change. This is part of a long term process in which continuous engagement is required through practical training and capacity building to further foster participatory approaches. However, it is clear that PV has been a useful first step towards changing attitudes, redressing power imbalances and increasing community participation within the platform. |
| Lessons | We learned a number of lessons through this participatory video project:   * **Building social capital and countering research fatigue**. The Fogera site has been the subject of extensive research in recent years and communities are increasingly reluctant to devote time to interacting with researchers when they see limited gains from their expenditure of time. Use of tools such as PV which are fun to use and which foster self-expression and self-esteem can help to counter research fatigue and build positive relationships with local communities. * **PV can be demanding of time and resources.** Production of the film required the full time engagement of a professional consultant for 10 days plus additional time from NBDC staff. Such deep engagement of professionals makes scaling of PV approaches difficult due to resource constraints. However, as we have yet to conduct further screenings of the film at higher level we are not yet in a position to judge whether the effort was justified. This will need to wait until we can assess the longer term impact on attitudes regarding participatory planning and implementation with higher level stakeholders. * **Messages can be lost in technical admiration.** Films produced by local communities are extremely engaging. We found that local innovation platform members were astonished at the competencies of local farmers in producing the film and at their ability to articulate complex issues with clarity. There is a danger that the core messages may be overwhelmed by short term admiration for this technical skill. Further screenings along with facilitated discussions may be needed to allow the core issues to come to the fore. * **Changing attitudes and increasing community participation is a long term process.** Although some changes in attitude have already been observed it is important to stress that any meaningful change will take time, and may not be possible within the timeframe of the project.   **Next steps.** We plan further screenings of the film at national level and will document the impact of the film and its usefulness in catalyzing change in approaches to rainwater management among higher level stakeholders. We are also experimenting with the use of less resource demanding methods of bringing community voice into innovation platforms including the use of photo stories.  The participatory video can be seen here:  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SSOm1hsCsE |
| **Describe the issues that have facilitated the success aspects of this story?** |
| **What has exacerbated the aspects of this story that have not gone well?** |
| Process | **Why and how was this story selected?**  This story was selected because it illustrates efforts that have been made to involve community members in the local level IP process using innovative approaches. Lack of community representation, and negative perceptions towards farmers on the part of higher level stakeholders, are significant issues that have emerged from the IP work to date. Finding ways to address these issues will be critical to the success of the IP activities on the ground, and will generate valuable lessons for future processes. |